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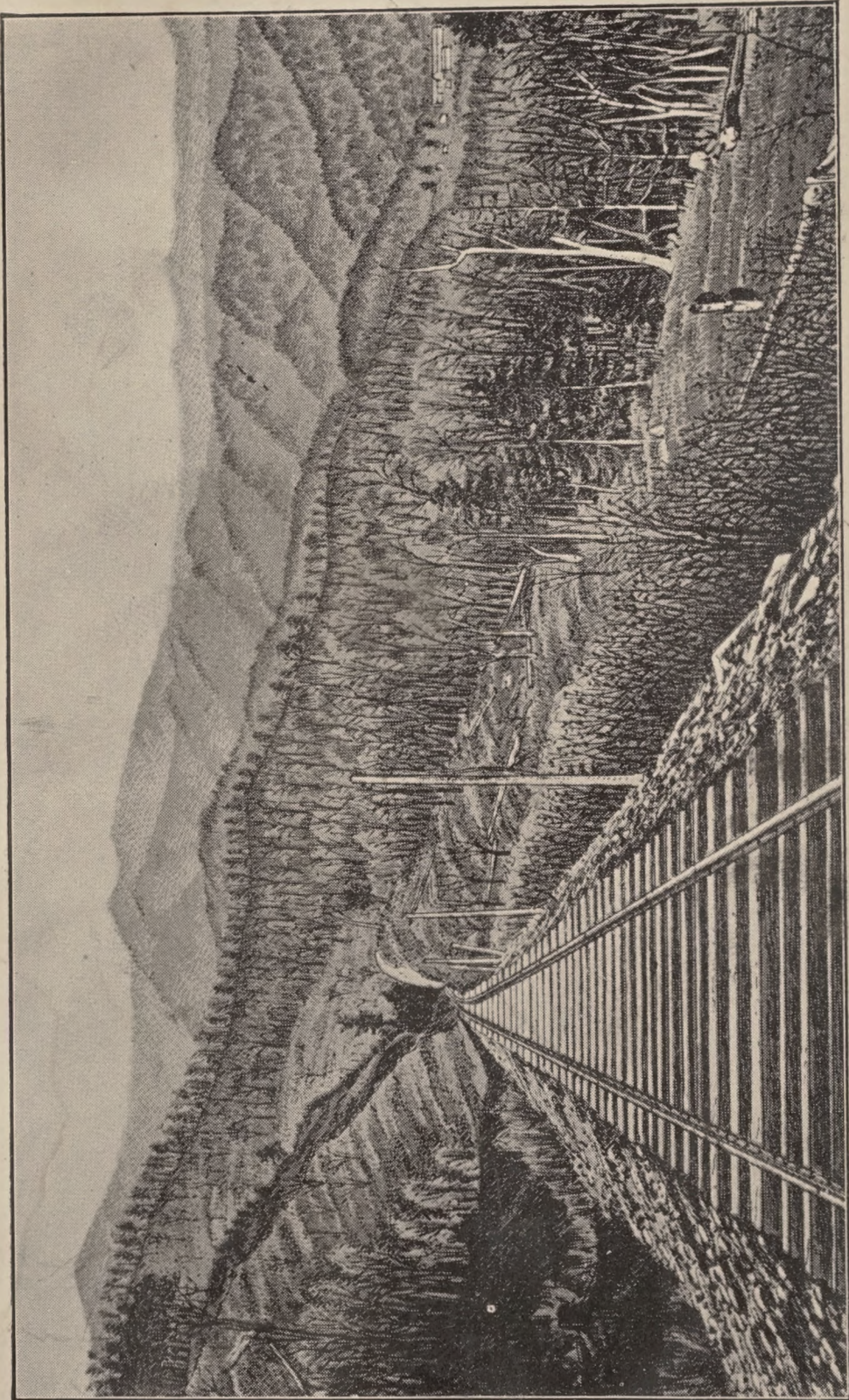
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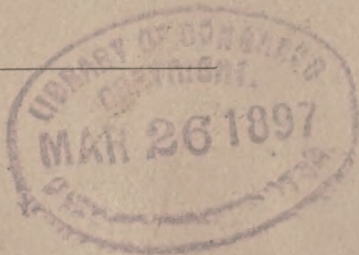


INTO THE BLUE RIDGE.

CAMPING
ON
THE BLUE RIDGE,
NEAR THE
“LICK LOG” TUNNEL.

BY
MRS. E. H. AMIS.

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Richmond, Va.:
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

1890

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1896



PRINTED BY
WHITTET & SHEPPERSON,
RICHMOND, VA.

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CAMPING ON THE BLUE RIDGE.

CHAPTER I.

PLANNING THE TRIP.

“**R**OSALIE! Rosalie! I have something splendid to tell you,” said Marie, as she bounded into her aunt’s room one bright June afternoon.

“My! my! child,” said Aunt Jane, “are the skies falling, and you’ve run here to tell us about it?”

“Now, Aunt Jane, how inconsistent you are, and how you do love to tease me! If the sky were falling couldn’t you see it here, as well as at our house, then what would be the use of my running to tell you? I think such a phenomenon would be anything but pleasant, and I really have something *splendid* to tell you.”

“Let’s have it then, without more ado,” said Rosalie, “I am sure I will think it fine if you say it is.”

"Why," said Marie, her eyes shining even with anticipated pleasure, "we are going to the mountains."

"Are you really in earnest, Marie, or is that only an air-castle which must vanish as so many of ours have already done?"

"Well, if this is an air-castle, I hope we may have many more like it, for I tell you that unless the sky does fall, as Aunt Jane says, or something else dreadful happens, we will surely go, for father says so, and the best of it is, that you are to go too, Rosalie; yes, you are going, dear old girl!" And Marie threw her arms around her cousin, and gave her an enthusiastic hug by way of emphasis. "We have it all planned out, for you need the trip, and our party would not be complete without you."

"Oh, Marie!" was all Rosalie could say, then Marie continued her information.

"Cousin James is going, too, father and mother, sister, Alves and Edwin."

"Well!" broke in Aunt Jane, "your ship must surely have come in; can't you take me, too?"

"No, indeed," said Marie, with a mischievous wink of her eye, "you won't let Rosalie use

slang, we can't have you along, for we want to do just as we like, and we might like to use a little slang while we are rusticating."

Marie and her aunt were on the most familiar terms, and often indulged in a little good-humored badinage when they met.

"If you two are to do as you please," said Aunt Jane, "I beg to be excused from being one of the party."

"If you don't care, then, pray who cares? So you need not put on airs," saucily sang Marie; "but we are going to the mountains all the same."

Then both girls sprang to their feet, and clasping their arms round each other danced up and down the room in the merriest girlish fashion. They only stopped dancing when they had gotten out into the porch and seated themselves under the fragrant vines to continue their interesting conversation.

"I say Marie," began Rosalie, "is this all really so? it seems too good to be true."

"Yes it does sound somewhat like a fairy tale, but you know my good father never indulges in air-castles, as you were saying, but lays his found-

ations firmly, and then makes his plans in the most matter-of-fact way possible. You see, we cannot bear the heat of summer here, and father thinks we had better leave town before severe illness drives us off, as was the case last season. He has been looking round for some time for a healthful retreat which would not be beyond our limited means. Not long ago father heard that the president of the N. C. R. R. had offered a pass over the road to any minister who would go up to the Stockade near the top of the Blue Ridge, and preach to the five hundred convicts who were employed in making the road. Major W. is an old friend of mother's, and when father wrote to him about our going he was very kind. He offered us all a pass over the road, and, in addition, the use of a double cabin which had been occupied by the captain and surgeon of the Stockade before it was moved farther over the mountain, if we felt inclined to try a sort of camping-life. Think of it, Rosalie, camping in a double log-cabin within one hundred yards of the top of the Blue Ridge! Could anything be more romantic?" Then the girls indulged in an enthusiastic squeal of delight. "You see,

there will really be very little expense. Cousin James is going to take mother and Alves across the country, so we will have the horse and jersey to go foraging with, as he says. Isn't it splendid to have him with us? You can't imagine how pleasant he is for such a trip, he is so unlike most college students, knows exactly what to do, and how to do it, is full of wit and humor, and talks so kindly to the plain people on the road that they all seem to like him very much."

"I can imagine it all," said Rosalie, "I never saw an own brother more devoted to sisters than he is to you girls."

Much more the happy girls had to talk of concerning their anticipated trip, but leaving them to their pleasant planning, we will introduce the reader to the other members of the party without going into any wearisome description of each one.

First was Marie's father, Rev. Edward Richards. Even the most casual observer could not fail to see in his thoughtful, almost grave, face, something that instantly commanded respect. He never forgot his sacred calling, yet his

ready sympathy, and peculiarly pleasant smile, won the love and confidence of young and old. Mrs. Richards was a real helpmeet, the friend and adviser of rich and poor, and the confidante of her daughters. Robina, the eldest, was just budding into beautiful womanhood. "A perfect woman, nobly planned to warn, to comfort, and command." She was nineteen, but so well developed, mentally, as to appear much older, yet there was no lack of gaiety of spirit in her temperament. Marie, and her cousin, Rosalie, the much-loved niece of Mr. Richards, were very near the same age, nearing the "magical seventeen," both brimful and bubbling over with fun and frolic. One might have supposed that life to them had been one bright summer day, yet each had known the overshadowing of dark clouds on their way, in the form of physical suffering and feeble health. But that only made them more tender in their sympathies, and more ready to share the sorrows and bear the burdens of their friends; the "children" of whom Marie had spoken were Alves, a girl of twelve, and Edwin, nearly ten years of age. The cousin, James, was Mrs. Richard's nephew.

James Burnett was a talented youth of twenty-one, not one of the romantically handsome sort, but so sprightly and genial in his manners that "to know him was to love him." These eight constituted the mountain party, all entirely congenial to each other.

Mr. Richards had carefully planned the trip, and every minute detail was entered into with as much zest by himself as by the more youthful members of the party.

When all was arranged to general satisfaction, Rosalie remarked: "There are just enough of us, and not one too many to be a jolly crowd, and won't we wake the echoes of those old mountains with our fun?"

CHAPTER II.

OFF TO THE MOUNTAINS.

HAVE you ever visited the mountains, gentle reader? Not to spend "the heated term" at some fashionable resort, but for real rusticating. If not, you can have no idea of the excitement and fun that there is in packing for such a trip.

"Be sure to come early to-morrow, Rosalie," said Marie, "for we will have a fine time packing. After much discussion, it has been decided that two trunks and a valise are to carry the wardrobes of the party—one for father, mother, and the children, the other for the three young misses."

"Think of it!" said Rosalie, "going off summering with only one trunk, instead of having a large Saratoga apiece!"

What a time they had deciding what was absolutely necessary, and then finding that the aforesaid trunk would not hold half the garments selected! After much taking out and

putting in, the important work was finished, and the merry trio went to assist in filling a large goods-box with necessaries—"all the household and kitchen furniture," as Marie declared.

"I say, girls," said Robina, "we are only to have one plate, cup, and saucer apiece; then some new tin plates and cups are to represent silver and cut glass."

"This toilet set must surely go in," said Marie, holding up a new tin washpan.

While the young people were amusing themselves over the variety of things they were getting into the "Noah's ark," as they dubbed the big box, Mr. and Mrs. Richards were collecting necessary supplies to refresh the inner man, not unmindful of bodily comfort, either, as evidenced by the bedding—bedticks (to be filled with straw), pillows, and blankets; which last, Mr. Burnett declared, made him shiver that hot day.

There was another box to go, too, the one into which the little melodeon was packed, for it was almost like a member of the family, and added greatly to their pleasure. Its soft notes

were always to be heard each morning and evening, when the whole household joined in sacred songs at the family altar. With it were also packed some books, and games to enliven rainy days when roving was an impossibility.

The boxes were shipped about a week before the party started, to insure their arrival in good time.

On the fifteenth of July, Mr. Richards, Robina, Marie, Rosalie, and little Edwin boarded the 9 A. M. train for Western North Carolina, leaving the others to make some arrangements for their absence, close the house, and make the trip across the country.

"I say, girls," said Robina, "I wish some of you would pinch me, that I may be sure we are on our way to the mountains, and this is not just a pleasant dream."

Both girls reached out a willing hand, and she might have had rather a painful sense of her identity but for a sudden glimpse of the mountains as the train passed around a curve.

Oh! the grandeur and beauty of those everlasting hills! The scenery along the Western North Carolina Railroad is beautiful beyond

description, and to Mr. Richards and his two daughters, whose home had formerly been at the foot of the Blue Ridge in Virginia, the sight of the mountains was like the familiar face of a dearly-loved friend. Their hearts were stirred with deeper feelings than those with which a casual observer would gaze at the exquisite beauty of the scenery. The girls, whose voluble tongues always found something worthy of remark, were awed into silence as the lovely panorama passed in and out of view.

At the town of Hickory an observation-car was attached to the train, from which our travellers enjoyed fully the magnificent views of the mountains, and ever and anon indulged in subdued exclamations of intense delight.

Sometimes the road wound round the mountain, which rose high on one side, while a chasm several hundred feet deep yawned on the other side. Often, without a moment's warning, the train plunged into a dark tunnel, and, before the eye was accustomed to the darkness, made visible by the dim light of a lamp, dashed out again into the full glare of daylight. The passengers often felt as if they were literally flying

through the air, and would have to hold their breath as the locomotive rushed over trestles of dizzy height. Filled with wonder and delight, our travellers passed from one scene of beauty to another.

About nightfall they reached Henry's, a small station a mile and a half from their destination. Here our travellers stopped, and they were glad to find an excellent hotel, where they met quite a number of pleasant acquaintances, among them Governor Z. B. Vance, who was a friend of both Mr. and Mrs. Richards. The President of the North Carolina Railroad, Major W——, was boarding with his family at the hotel, and they, also, were old acquaintances. Mr. Wm. Brown and his family were rustivating for the summer in a small house on the opposite side of the road.

After being refreshed by a hearty supper, our travellers spent a delightful evening in the parlor with a number of congenial friends in

“Converse familiar, sportive, kind;

Where heart met heart, mind quickened mind;

And thoughts and words were all at play,

Like children on a holiday.”

Robina was delighted to find a piano, and added much to the enjoyment of the evening by her vocal and instrumental music, being a fine performer, and having a bird-like voice which never failed to charm all who heard her songs, whether scientific, pathetic, or comic. Mr. Richards was devoted to music, and had a voice of wonderful scope and strength, singing by note any part with perfect ease. He and Robina sang much together, their music being classic, comic, or sacred, as most preferred. "The Grasshopper," an amusing parody upon classic music, which they sang together with much spirit, never failed to "bring down the house."

"Well, girls," said Marie, when they had retired for the night, "isn't this a fine beginning for our summer? I had no idea that we should find such congenial friends so near. I imagined that we would live a real wild life among the mountains, and 'rough it' all the time. I wonder if these nice folks will smile as graciously upon us when they know that we are to live in a double log cabin?"

"Of course they will," said Robina. "They

are real sensible people; and, besides, they already know it; and Mr. David Brown, who is express and mail agent on the train, says that he is very glad of having the pleasure of seeing and waving to us twice every day as he passes on the train. He will wave 'how-d'-ye-do' to us, and, if we are all alive and well, we will wave a white flag to him. If a wild beast has devoured any of us, or any one has gotten lost, or anything is amiss, we are to wave a red flag of distress, and he will send us help immediately. He kindly offered to be our mail-carrier, too; said that he would arrange with the engineer to 'slow up' in passing our cabin, so that he could throw off our mail; and when we have letters to send, they are to be tied in a package to the top of a long pole and handed up to him."

"Hurrah!" cried Rosalie, "isn't it splendid to be here?"

"Yes," said Marie, "but our cabin on the mountain-side will be rather different from the comforts here."

"Infinitely better, and more independent," broke in Rosalie, enthusiastically.

CHAPTER III.

MOUNTAIN PERCH.

OUR travellers rose early the next morning, and, immediately after breakfast, started in search of the "castle," as they called their temporary cabin-home. Having secured a wagon for the transportation of boxes and trunks, Major W—— kindly sent two "trusties" (convicts whose time of service had almost expired) to render any assistance necessary.

The day was a perfect one, and, instead of the sense of weakness and languor which one feels on a hot July morning in the low country, the air was so cool and bracing that it gave a delicious strength and vigor to the whole party.

They were told to take the old stage-road for one and a half miles, then take the first right-hand road they saw, and the distance was very short to the "old stockade," a place painfully familiar to many a culprit in chain and balls. The stage-road wound between two ranges of mountains, whose sides were covered with va-

rious kinds of evergreens, mosses, ferns, and lovely wild flowers of every hue. At the foot of one of the ranges flowed a beautiful brook of transparent water, which crossed and recrossed the road on its shining way, as it leaped over the rocks in its bed, sparkling in the morning sun as if loaded with diamonds.

Sometimes the party climbed up the steep mountain-side to gather flowers of rare beauty; sometimes they crossed the stream by jumping from one to another of the smooth rocks which raised their heads above the water, stopping frequently to bathe their foreheads in the delightfully cool water, and to gather the long, green moss which, in many places, covered the stones which formed the bed of the stream.

Robina, always more thoughtful than the other two girls, walked quietly most of the way by her father and little Edwin, though she enjoyed none the less the beauties of nature, which were spread in rich profusion around them. Suddenly they heard three loud cheers from Marie and Rosalie, who had walked more rapidly than the others, and, turning a sharp curve in the road, they caught sight of a small

house perched upon the mountain-side about one hundred yards above them. Again the joyous shout echoed from the everlasting hills, "Hurrah for our mountain home!"

"Is that the house, John?" inquired Mr. Richards, of one of the convicts.

"Yes, sir," answered the tall, kindly-looking young man; "that was the captain's house, and this old one down here," pointing to a long, barn-like building near where they were standing, "is where we convicts were kept until about five months ago, when we were moved further up on the mountain to be nearer our work on the railroad. There were two other long houses like this one, which were moved to the other stockade."

"How many of you were here?" asked Robina.

"About five hundred, ma'am; but lots of the poor fellows died who came from the low country, for it is awful cold up here in the winter."

"John," said Mr. Richards, in a kind, pitying tone, "did you ever think that those who were left are spared in God's mercy, that they

may have time to repent of sin and learn to love Jesus? I am going to preach to you all every Sabbath morning, and I hope that many of you may be led by God's Spirit to love and trust the Saviour, who gave his life to save you."

"Oh! Mr. Richards," exclaimed the poor man, "you don't mean to say that Christ died for such fellows as we all are, do you?"

"Yes, my friend, that is just what I mean," he replied, speaking with much earnestness. "No one is too great a sinner for Jesus to save, for he says, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' I want you to remember, John, that, no matter what you have done, or how you are living now, Jesus loves you, and that he died to save even the chief of sinners. How are we to get our things up to that house yonder?" inquired Mr. Richards.

"We fellows will carry them up on our backs, sir," John answered, he being spokesman for both. "Jim and I can carry up the smallest box while you all unpack the other things and fix them up in bundles for us."

As Marie and Rosalie were already in the

cabin, sweeping vigorously with brooms taken up from Henry's, Mr. Richards and Robina went to work as directed, and the empty house soon began to assume the appearance of a home. The empty boxes were turned up on end, shelves nailed in them, and, with curtains quite artistically arranged over them, formed dressing-table and *bouffet*.

"Be sure to put our china, silver, and cut-glass where they will show to the best advantage," laughingly suggested Marie.

"What shall we do for chairs," asked Robina, "and a table to eat on, too?"

"There is a rough table and some benches down yonder at the old stockade," said John. "If you would be willing to use them, and will give us some soap and rags, Jim and I will scour them clean and nice for you."

"We will be very much obliged to you," said Robina, in a kind voice, which was evidently much appreciated by the poor, disgraced young men, who retired to the foot of the hill, armed with soap and rags for their work of scouring.

"You see, girls," said Mr. Richards, "the Lord has given us more to do here than sim-

ply to rusticate and enjoy ourselves. Let us all seek earnestly to help these poor convicts in every way possible."

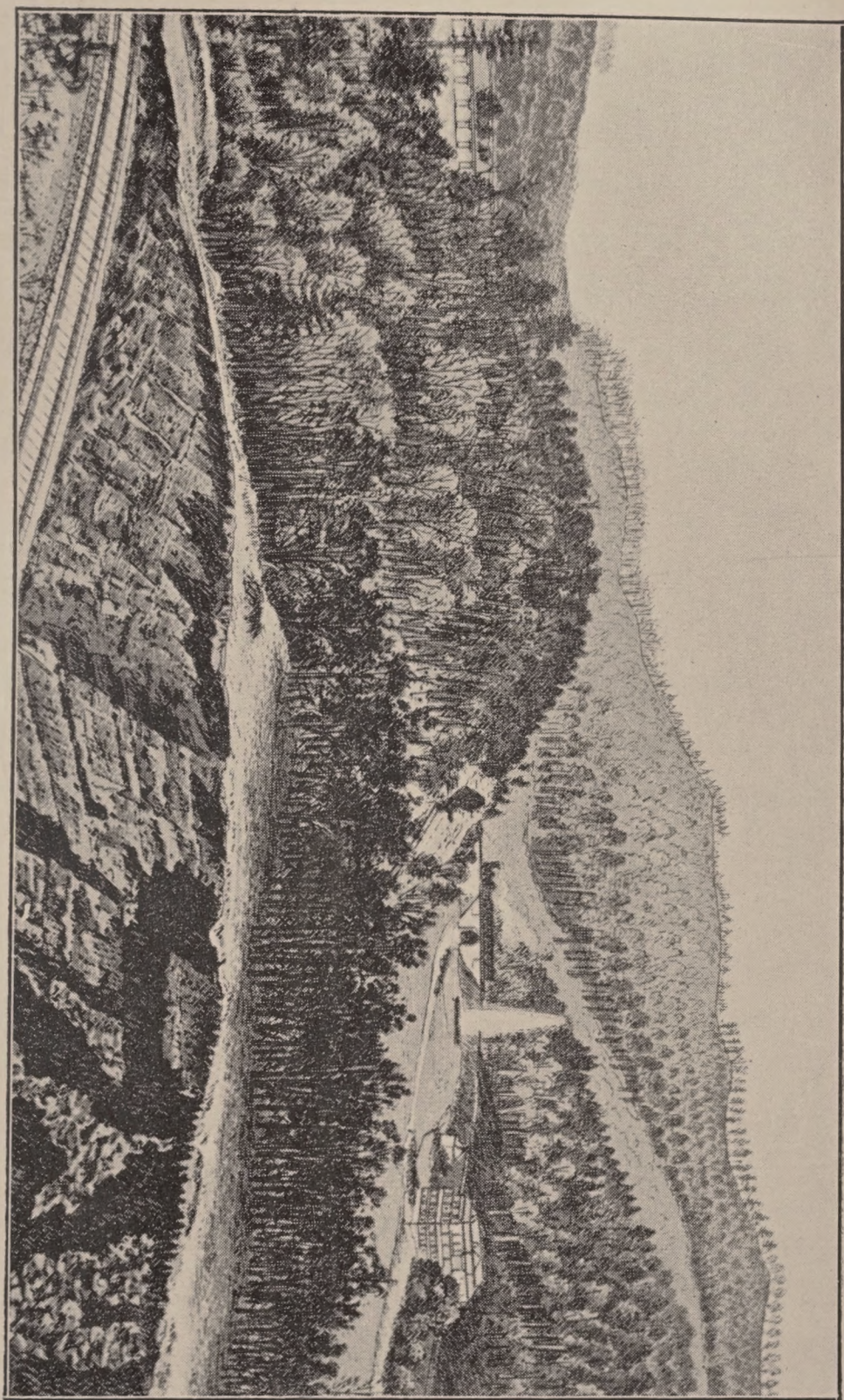
"Yes," said Marie, "I could not but notice how grateful they seemed for your kind words. Even that poor, brow-beaten Jim looked up once and smiled, until his poor, hard face seemed almost transformed. I never saw a smile make such a change before."

"What do you say, uncle," asked Rosalie, "to our giving the men some of our lunch? We have quite a supply left still."

"A very good idea, that, my practical girl. Our Saviour himself supplied the temporal wants of the people, not only to show his power, but to show his sympathy for us in all our wants."

While Robina got out the lunch, Marie and Rosalie went in search of fresh water, which John had told them they would find at a beautiful mountain-spring near by, if they would follow a little path around the ridge.

"The spring must be some distance off," said Robina, when they returned, "you were gone such a long time."



RAILROAD AT SIX POINTS.

"No," said Rosalie, "it is only a short distance, but this mountain-side is so wild and rugged that we were out of sight twice just going that short distance to the spring."

"Oh! sister," broke in Marie, "you can't imagine how beautiful that spring is up among the moss-covered rocks! There are long ferns growing all round it, and so many lovely flowers in bloom. I think the place is beautiful enough for a home of the muses, and the clear, cold water would serve them as nectar."

"Now, just let me tell you," said Mr. Richards, with one of his genial smiles, "if you romantic young misses do not be careful, you will find those rocks the home of *snakes* instead of nymphs, and THEY MAY MAKE YOU sing a very different song from those sung by the muses."

"Are there any rattle-snakes here, father?" asked Marie.

"Plenty of them, no doubt. But there are our men, and we must give them something to eat and let them go."

"How nice and white you have scoured the table and benches!" said Robina. "We are all much obliged to you both, and will remember

your kind thoughtfulness while we are using them. I hope we will be able to do something for you some time."

When Mr. Richards had paid them liberally for their help, and given them a good lunch, they seemed very grateful; but when he shook hands with each, and bade them good-bye with a few kind words, their eyes filled with tears, and they seemed unable to speak.

As they started up the mountain they passed little Edwin, who held out his hand with the loving confidence of a child, saying, "I want you to love Jesus, he is so good; and I am going to ask him to make you good, too."

"All right, little boss. We surely do need somebody to pray for us, and he is more apt to hear your prayers than those of bigger folks."

They climbed the mountain in silence until they reached the railroad, then stopped, turned, and looked down on the little cabin a hundred yards below them.

"I say, Jim," said John, "did you ever see such kind people?"

"Yes," said Jim, heaving a deep sigh, while an expression of intense sadness crossed his

face, "I have known just such good, kind people; but, oh!"—clasping his hand to his heart as if seized with violent pain—"I cannot tell you about it now; it will kill me; some other time I will tell you about it. Did you hear what that sweet little boy said? God pity me!" he exclaimed, looking up toward heaven in anguish. "Oh! that I could be good and innocent again as that little boy is!"

CHAPTER IV.

CAMP LIFE.

“GOOD morning, young ladies!” said Mr. Richards, the morning after their arrival, when the three girls made their appearance on the back porch, “I hope none of you feel injured by early rising; do you know it is nine o’clock?”

“Nine o’clock!” echoed the girls, “you must be joking, the sun is just rising!”

“See for yourselves,” said Mr. Richards, holding out his watch for inspection, “you forgot how high these mountains rise on all sides, except at the ‘Gap’ through which we came here, so it is nine o’clock before Old Sol shows his face above their tops.”

“Hurrah!” cried Marie, “I call this fine, I think I never before slept as sweetly as I did last night upon our bed of green leaves; don’t you suppose Adam and Eve had beds like ours, father?”

“Perhaps so,” said Mr. Richards, “this is

certainly a delightful place to sleep, but I feel an 'aching void' which makes me think that it is probably a fine place to sharpen the appetite, too; who is to be our cook this morning?"

"I am cook to-day," said Rosalie, "and it is well perhaps that this fine mountain air does sharpen the appetite, for I fear I shall not be able to prepare anything very tempting, as the only cooking apparatus we find is a large old-fashioned oven with a piece of sheet-iron for a top."

But Rosalie was a first-rate little housekeeper, without a particle of back-down in her composition, and she went to work with a will, making the best of everything and joking over each new inconvenience as it arose. In a very short time breakfast was prepared, and eaten with much relish by all the party, immediately after which they gathered around the family altar, and those grand old hills must have felt like breaking forth into singing, and the trees like clapping their hands, when those sweet songs of praise floated out upon the air.

The party were soon thrown into quite a

state of excitement by hearing the distant rumble of the approaching train. All ran out "like regular mountaineers," as Marie said, to see the train pass above them. True to his promise, Mr. Brown waved a salute, and received cheers and waves in return.

"Look!" said Robina, "he has thrown off something, too."

With such a good excuse, they all started to the railroad, which, though only a hundred yards from the cabin, required some time for the ascent, as it was a steep climb straight up the mountain-side. When they were about half-way up, all stopped to gaze at the novel sight before them. The smoke from the train was pouring out of the "Lick Log" tunnel, looking as if a beautiful cloud might have dropped from the blue sky to float a few moments over the grand old mountain, and then lose itself among the ferns and flowers. When the railroad was reached, the mail was eagerly examined. Among the letters was a note for Robina from Miss Brown, which proved very interesting.

"Hurrah!" said Robina, "we are all invited

to a social tea-drinking to-morrow at Mr. Brown's!"

"How delightful that will be!" exclaimed the other girls, "we did not expect such pleasures as that up here."

"No," said Mr. Richards, "our cabin down yonder looks as if it might be outside of the bounds of civilization."

"Look, uncle," said Rosalie, "at this exemplification of the truthful old saying, 'There are two sides to every question.' From this side our castle looks as if it were stuck down in a cove, and from the stockade it looks like a veritable mountain perch."

"Father," broke in Marie, "now that we are this high up, suppose we go on to the top of the mountain, it is just a mile from here."

"I am ready for anything that is agreeable to the party," said Mr. Richards, and as all were eager for the walk, they started off, Rosalie and Marie taking the lead as usual. They had not gone far, when the good man stood as if spell-bound, gazing in horror at the reckless girls. "My!" he exclaimed, "I am thankful they are over safely!"

As they looked back at him in triumph he called to them: "Girls, I shall have to make you walk behind if you do not promise to go more slowly and carefully over these dangerous trestles."

"Why, father," said Marie, "we are not at all afraid; but if you prefer it, we will go over more slowly hereafter."

It was indeed quite a risk to walk across the trestles; some of them were more than one hundred feet high and several hundred yards across. Deep gorges between the mountains were built up with trestle-work, which had not then been filled in, so that the only way foot-passengers could cross was by stepping from sill to sill, where a misstep would precipitate them into the chasm below. Mr. Richards almost hesitated to take little Edwin over, lest he should become dizzy, but the brave little fellow felt no fear while holding his father's hand. Why cannot grown-up children cling as trustingly to the heavenly Father's hand? Just beyond the trestle was a long tunnel, which made such a curve that the light at one end could not be seen at the other. It was so

dark that even the venturesome girls were quite satisfied to fall back with Mr. Richards and feel their way over the sills. The walk was so wild and strange, and the scenery so varied and beautiful, that the top of the mountain was reached sooner than they had anticipated. There they found the stockade, where five hundred convicts were confined at night after each day's work on the famous Swanannoa tunnel. Captain Smith, who commanded the stockade, introduced himself, was very polite, and offered kindly to have the party taken through the tunnel any time they wished to do so. That pleasure they postponed with thanks until another day.

The sight of so many men and boys in prison stripes, wearing chains and balls, and guarded by armed officers, was a sad one to the whole party. Little Edwin drew close to his father and whispered, "Oh, father! I am so sorry for all these poor men."

It was touching to see the change of expression upon the hardened faces of the convicts from stolid indifference to pleasant surprise, as Mr. Richards greeted each squad with a genial smile and "Good morning, boys."

Having decided to return by the old stage road, the party had just started down the mountain when they met one of the convicts, whom they recognized as the John who had helped them on their arrival at the cabin. Without waiting to return the cordial salutation of the party, he exclaimed, earnestly: "I am very glad you came up, Mr. Richards. Won't you please go and see poor Jim? He was taken with a strange spell last night, and has been awful bad off ever since. He keeps saying over the words of the verse you told us."

"I will be glad to go; take me to him," said Mr. Richards. Then turning to the girls, he said, "You can amuse yourselves over on the hillside until I get back."

"This is but a poor, dirty place to ask you into, Mr. Richards," said John, "but I guess it is as good as we deserve."

When Jim saw Mr. Richards standing by him he turned his face to the wall and wept, but, reassured by the kind voice and soothing touch of the hand laid gently upon his aching head, he extended his hand to Mr. Richards, but his face wore a look of such misery as one

seldom sees. Then he said, with much emotion: "It is very kind of you, Mr. Richards, to come to this disgusting place to see me. Oh!" he continued, with a shudder, "how dreadful it smells; what would my mother think to see me here!" Losing all self-control, he sobbed like a child, his whole frame shaking with the violence of his emotion. Mr. Richards let him find relief in tears a few moments, while he silently lifted his heart in prayer that the Spirit might teach him what to say. He then told him the "old, old story" in the most simple, earnest language. Jim listened eagerly to every word, saying, with a deep sigh, "Oh, how good it all sounds now! I would not listen to it long ago, when my beautiful mother tried to teach me of Jesus and his love, and it is too late now—too late now!"

Very tenderly the good minister talked with the suffering boy, listened with interest to the sad story of his blighted life, and urged him to look to the Saviour for the only true comfort in sorrow. After reading a short passage of Scripture, and making an earnest prayer in his behalf, Mr. Richards bade him farewell, pro-

mising to see him again the next day, and went directly to the office of Captain Smith, telling him he feared that Jim was seriously sick and needed immediate medical attention. Captain Smith was much interested, said Jim was his special favorite, and was so trustworthy that he often released him from hard work upon the road to have his company and assistance when needing help. "It is my opinion," said the captain, with much warmth, "that that boy is more sinned against than sinning, and has no more business to be wearing those old stripes than I have. I have seen him severely tested, and would trust his word as soon as I would my own. If he is going to be very sick he shall not stay where he is. I will be responsible for him, and bring him into the back room of my office here, where I can give him proper attention."

Feeling sure that the sufferer would be kindly cared for, Mr. Richards returned with his party to their cabin home. Faithful to his promise, Mr. Richards went the next morning to look after Jim, whom he found suffering in a way which confirmed his fears that the disease was

typhoid fever. The physician of the stockade was in attendance. Captain Smith had made him as comfortable as was possible in his surroundings, and every necessary attention was kindly given. The poor boy was very glad to see Mr. Richards, and even the godless captain and physician seemed to be reassured by his presence. Why do those who scorn the advice and shun the company of a minister when in health call for him in times of sickness and danger? Jim felt that Mr. Richards was the only one who could help him now. His genuine sympathy and sincere interest had touched his heart and made him willing to talk freely to him of his past life. When there were no others present he said, with tears, "Oh, Mr. Richards, I long for my mother now more than I have ever done since I left her. If I could only have her soft hand on my head and know that she would forgive all my wrong-doings, it would take such a heavy burden off my heart."

"Let me write to her, Jim; I know she would forgive all, and gladly come to you now. I will tell her how sorry you are, and that you were not as guilty as was supposed."

“Oh, no! you must not write to my mother; she thinks me dead, and I had better be dead than awaken the fearful sorrow which so nearly destroyed her reason and life. I have heard of her, but with my changed name she has had no trace of me since the evil hour when I yielded to the entreaties of wicked companions and left my beautiful home in the sunny South. I have told you how I wandered from place to place, until I have come to what you see me now, wearing the stripes and chains. Oh! if there is forgiveness with God for such a sinner as I am, tell me how I can obtain it. Tell me how I can find peace for my sin-burdened heart, and if my life is spared I will yet make amends to my dear mother for all the sorrow I have caused her.”

With gentle, soothing words of the love of Jesus, Mr. Richards quieted the excited sufferer, repeated some comforting texts of Scripture, and, with a warm hand-shake, bade him good-bye.

CHAPTER V.

TEA-DRINKING AT MR. BROWN'S.

“**Y**OU must not forget, father,” said Marie, “that we are invited this afternoon to play croquet and take tea at Mr. Brown’s. I hope there is nothing to prevent your going with us.”

“I am promising myself the pleasure of the visit,” said Mr. Richards, “but I have several letters to write before starting, which must be ready for the evening mail.”

“We must start quite early, father,” said Robina, “so that we may walk leisurely and have time to gather flowers and ferns by the way.”

“I think I can safely promise not to keep you waiting,” said her father, with a merry twinkle in his eye, as he glanced at the tenderly-loved daughter, who not unfrequently kept him waiting.

In a short time all were ready for the walk, and it is needless to say were in the gayest of

spirits. As the girls left the house, Mr. Richards looked at each one with genuine satisfaction, and they did look lovely in their nicely-fitting pure white muslins. There was nothing of the artificial society girl about them, their cheeks were as free from paint as a tea-rose, yet as delicately tinted, and their eyes sparkled with the innocent mirth and happiness that filled their pure young hearts. Marie and Rosalie took the lead as usual, running down the steep mountain-side so rapidly that a fall at the bottom seemed inevitable, but they reached the stream safely, cleared it at a bound and looked back in triumph at the more dignified pedestrians.

"Girls," said Robina, "you are getting exceedingly wild; you must promise me to be more dignified, and behave nicely while you are among those strangers at Henry's."

"Indeed we will," said Rosalie, "we intend to be as still as mice, and fix our mouths firm like this," screwing her mouth and putting on such a look as to provoke a hearty laugh from all.

"If you irrepressibles do not behave well,

we will have to leave you at home the next time."

"We will not disgrace you, or ourselves either, sister," said Marie, "but it is so beautiful up here and this mountain air is so delicious and bracing that 'I'm just spilin',' as Jim Fenton said, to run and scream all the time."

The afternoon was beautiful, and, though it was the middle of July, the air was so balmy, and the mountain breezes so refreshing, that the walk from the "castle" to Henry's along the shady road was not at all fatiguing. The young folks climbed the mountain-side for ferns and wild flowers, and adorned themselves with wreaths and bouquets.

"Sister," said Marie, "they might mistake us for wood nymphs. Oh, my!" she exclaimed, before Robina had time to answer her remark, "how lovely you do look! the walk has given you such a bright color and those flowers in your hair are very becoming."

"Isn't it a pity everybody could not look at your big sis through your glasses?" said Robina.

Marie was an ardent admirer of her sister,

and so were many others, for Robina was not only very handsome, but such charming company that she never failed to attract attention wherever she went. Yet there was so much beauty of character that admiration never seemed to excite her vanity. The evening proved a delightful one with the friends at Henry's, for though our party enjoyed the wild camp-life at the "castle," they appreciated none the less the congenial companionship of cultured friends.

"Oh, what blooming young ladies!" said Mr. Brown, as the three girls approached the veranda, where Miss Ella Brown and her brother, Miss Nannie, and Mr. Ned W—— were awaiting their arrival.

"See what beautiful flowers our 'castle' affords," said Robina, gracefully waving her large bouquet of ferns and wild flowers, as she presented them to the young ladies, saying that as they, too, were mountain girls they must adorn themselves for the evening with wild flowers.

Glancing at the rosy cheeks of the visitors, one of the gentlemen gallantly remarked that it was quite evident the "castle" could furnish

roses of rare loveliness and beauty, in addition to more common flowers.

After spending some time in merry conversation a match game of croquet was proposed, and as there were only seven young people they insisted that Mr. Richards should take a hand, which he willingly consented to do, being quite fond of the game and a skilful player. His tact and love for young folks, added to their pleasure, rather than acted as a restraint upon their enjoyments. The games were quite exciting, but the players found time for lively chatting while waiting for their turns to play, and our young girls found opportunities which they never neglected for saying earnest words, too, where they might do good. What a pity it is that all young ladies do not use the influence they might exert upon the young men, if they only had the moral courage to speak words in season to them as earnestly as they speak on ordinary topics.

"This is a grand road, Mr. Brown," said Robina, "but it must be as dangerous as it is beautiful."

"It is," replied the young man. "I was

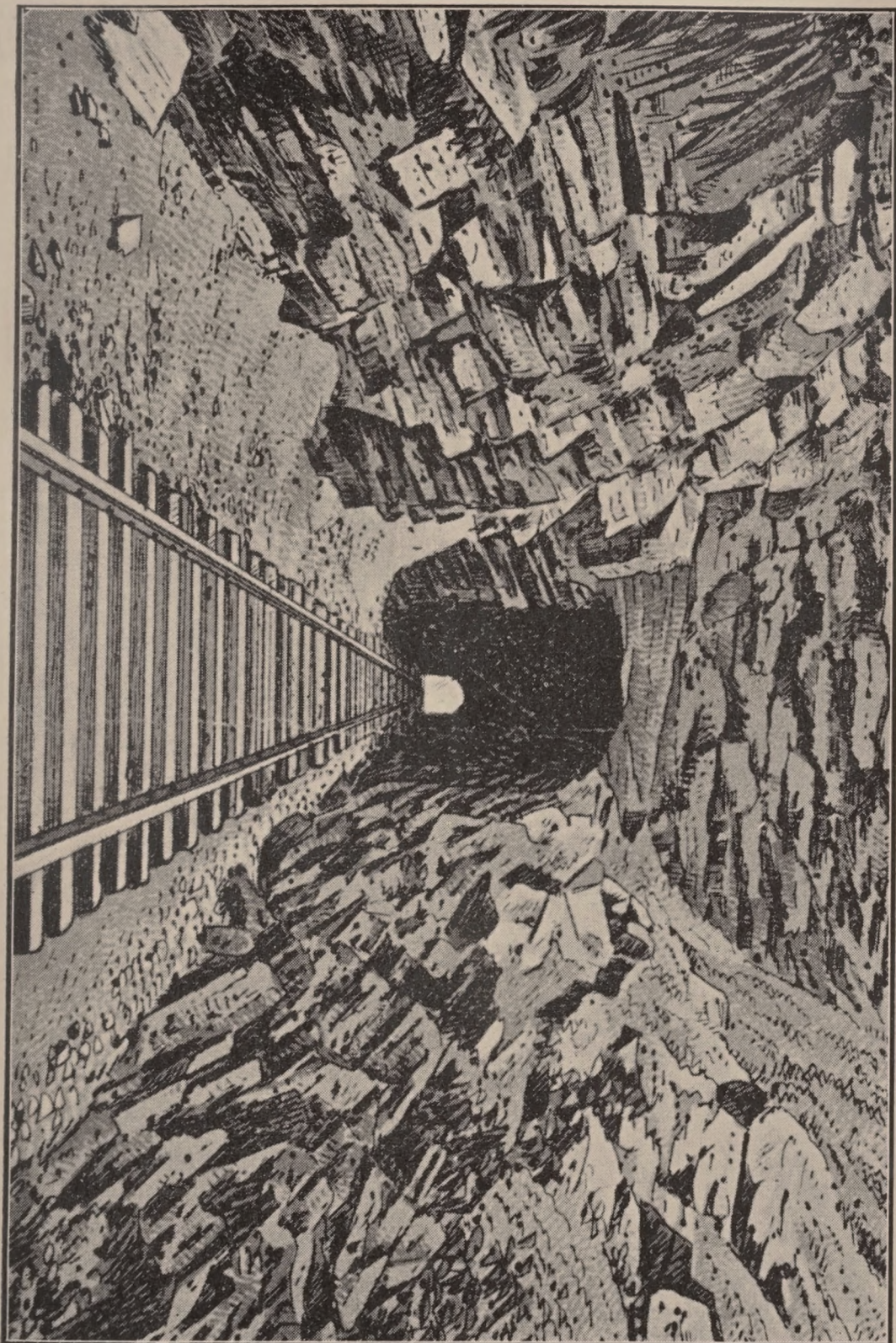
standing yesterday upon the steps of the passenger-coach, had been there some little time, and without any special reason for doing so, went into the car near the 'Lick Log' tunnel, and had scarcely taken my seat when a huge rock crushed down upon the step where I had been standing and snapped it off as if it had been glass. But for having left the step, I would doubtless have been killed instantly."

"Oh!" said Robina, shuddering, "what a narrow escape you made! you must certainly have been spared for some great good."

"I do not know about that," said Mr. Brown, "I would like to think I shall be useful in this world, and I am very sure I should not have been ready for the next one, if that rock had sent me to it."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," said Robina.

"Well, I have a plenty of company," continued her companion, "for there is not a man upon this road who is a Christian, from the president to the man who fires the engine. It seems rather singular, for if any road ought to have good men on it this is surely the one."



LICK LOG TUNNEL

“Hurrah!” cried Ned, “that winds up the game and we’ve beat you bad! I hope you folks won’t grieve too much over your defeat to enjoy your supper. I hear the bell now.”

Mrs. Brown entertained delightfully, and certainly nothing prevented our players from doing full justice to the elegant repast spread before them. Miss Ella Brown was one of the class of genial, attractive young girls who know how to make visitors feel comfortably easy and at home. She excelled herself that summer afternoon, and “the feast of reason and flow of soul” added much to the pleasure of the mountain tea-drinking.

“You say you haven’t been to Round Knob, Miss Marie?” asked Mr. Ned W——, the irrepressible young college student, who said the most common-place things in such an amusing way that laughing was a necessity with his listeners.

“No,” said Marie, “we have had so much to entertain us nearer home thus far, that we still have that trip as an anticipated pleasure.”

“Then you have not visited the C—— Falls either, I suppose?”

"No, we have not been to the Falls, and are really such ignoramuses as not even to know where they are."

"Well! well!" said Ned, "I have lived to meet one young lady who acknowledges that she does not know something which is a well-known fact to a college boy! I propose that we show our appreciation of her honesty by making a party, and having a picnic at the Falls in her honor."

"Oh, thank you very much!" said Marie, "both for your compliment to myself at the expense of my sex, and for the proposed jaunt; do let's go next Thursday, that will be my birthday, and I think it would be splendid to have the important day celebrated in such a way. I am very partial to nice picnics, and, of course, one in which you were interested could not be otherwise than very fine."

"That is a self-evident fact," said Ned, "so it is proposed and seconded that we have an uncommonly nice picnic next Thursday at the Falls in honor of Miss Marie's birthday. The next subject for discussion will be horses for the trip, as no buggy could possibly pass

over some parts of the road. I shall have to starve my pony several days before we go or he could not squeeze through some narrow places in the road."

"The rest of our party will be here before that time," said Mr. Richards, "and my horse can take two if necessary; and I know my nephew, James Burnett, will want to be one of our party."

"Our party will not be complete unless our champion croquet player goes to chaperon us," said Miss Ella.

"If you intend to include old folks, I should greatly enjoy the trip," said the good man.

"You are older than the rest of us, but you are so bright and happy and your heart seems so young, that we are not afraid of you as we are of most ministers."

"You are the first preacher I ever saw," said Ned, "who did not awe me by his solemn, sanctimonious air; they all seem to be thinking when they look at me, 'it is a shame for you to make such a monkey of yourself, Ned, such a sinner as you are has no right to laugh.' But you are real jolly, Mr. Richards, I love to

see you laugh because you don't seem to think it is a sin to smile."

The company smiled audibly at Ned's remark, and then discussed the picnic. Ned volunteered to carry the rations, saying that picnic meant picking up lots of nick-nacks to eat, and he wanted a plentiful supply of good things prepared.

After all arrangements were completed, Mrs. Brown asked for some music, and the time sped rapidly away until the "castle" party rose to return to their mountain home, cordially thanking their kind entertainers for the delightful evening.

"Don't forget that you are to preach for us next Sabbath afternoon, Mr. Richards," said Mrs. Brown. "I hope your whole party can come down with you."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MORE THE MERRIER.

“YONDER they come!” shouted little Edwin, who had been watching the gap in the mountain to catch the first glimpse of the rest of the party who were expected that day.

This shout was the signal for three cheers from the inmates of the “castle,” and, before the echoes had died away from the mountainsides, they had all rushed down the ridge to welcome the new-comers and escort them up the steep ascent.

The girls had arranged large bouquets of ferns and wild flowers in both rooms, and had made the “castle” look as neat and home-like as possible.

“Here, auntie,” said Rosalie, “just stand in this door and look round at the beautiful view. Isn’t it lovely?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Richards, “we will have a continual feast for the eyes here. Those everlasting hills always recall that beautiful text,

‘As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even for evermore.’ ”

It took only a short time to introduce the the new-comers to the premises.

“Well,” said James, “this is the ‘castle,’ is it? I think it will require quite a stretch of imagination to give to ‘airy nothing a local habitation and a name,’ if we furnish this ‘castle’ with the necessary ‘donjon keep and tower.’ I suppose my room in the loft is one of the apartments of the tower. Hello here! Is this a specimen of the visitors we are expected to receive?” said the young man, as he seized Mr. Richards’ stout walking-cane, and began to pound vigorously upon a snake which was gliding through the hall, which, with two rooms and “the loft,” composed the apartments of the “castle.”

“Horrors!” exclaimed Robina, growing pale with fright, “a snake in the house! And I am so much afraid of snakes!”

“You need not feel obliged to faint, cousin mine,” said James, “for this is not a rattlesnake.”

"You must have attracted it," said Robina, "for we have not seen one before since we came."

"It doubtless came to welcome us. I have heard of snake-charmers, and, as I always succeed in charming the girls, I suppose I might attract snakes, too."

"Whew!" said Rosalie, "the conceit of some people is amazing!"

"I hope I can kill a rattlesnake while we are up here," said Marie. "I am just aching for some such adventure."

"My child," said Mr. Richards, "you must promise me that if you see a rattlesnake while we are here you will not attempt to kill it, but get out of its way as quickly as possible. I have been told that we are quite near a rattlesnake den. One of those knobs is so infested with them that they are very bold all around us. A child of our nearest neighbor was chased by one for half-a-mile quite recently."

"Thank you for the warning, father, for I should certainly have attempted to kill one if I had seen it. Rosalie and I will be more cautious hereafter as we climb over the rocks for ferns and wild flowers."

"Come with me, please, mother," said little Edwin. "I hear the train, and I want you to see how beautiful the smoke looks pouring out of the tunnel after the cars have passed through."

All went out on the back porch, as was their custom, to wave to Mr. Brown. He gave an extra flourish, by way of welcoming the last arrivals, and then threw off a large bundle of mail. Rosalie and Edwin climbed the mountain to the railroad to get the letters, and had the pleasure of seeing a long excursion-train pass just as they reached the top. Among the many passengers who had availed themselves of the opportunity for seeing the beautiful scenery along the Western North Carolina Railroad, Rosalie recognized a friend from home, who was looking out for the "castle" among the hills, and who cheered loudly as he passed in sight of it. Then, seeing Rosalie and Edwin near the track, he threw off a slip of paper upon which was written, "Look out for a friend from down the country." Rosalie hastened back with this item of news for the rest.

Very soon they saw Mr. Lee coming down the mountain, and all gave him a cordial welcome. He was a noble, lovable character; and the hectic flush in his cheeks showed only too surely the signal of early death from inherited disease, which gave his friends a peculiarly tender interest in him.

“What a lovely retreat you good friends have found!” he exclaimed, when the usual greetings had been exchanged. “You all seem as happy as big sunflowers, tucked away down here in this mountain cave.”

“‘Down here,’ indeed!” said Rosalie. “If you had climbed up from the stream below us, I think by the time you had reached our ‘castle’ you would have said we were decidedly stuck up.”

“Well, I hope to have the benefit of your mountain air for some time; and who knows but it may sharpen my wits, as it seems to have done yours, Miss Rosalie?”

“I am glad to hear that you will stay in the mountains, Mr. Lee,” said Marie, “not insinuating that your wits need sharpening, but you will be near enough at Alexander’s to ride over

next week and join my birthday picnic party, and we will all be delighted to have you with us on that important occasion."

"Thank you," said Mr. Lee; "the ride is a very pleasant one, and I assure you that it will give me great pleasure to accept your invitation."

"Mr. Lee," said Edwin, "I want you to see our beautiful mountain spring."

"And I," said Alves, "want to show you the loveliest play-house you ever saw."

"How popular I am!" said Mr. Lee, with a merry twinkle in his beautiful brown eyes.

"Yes," said Mrs. Richards, "I put in a claim, too, that you dine in rustic style with us; then you may enjoy at your leisure the sights round our mountain home."

The invitation was accepted, and the day was much enjoyed by all the party. Mr. Lee, when leaving, thanked Mrs. Richards for one of the most pleasant days he had ever spent, promising to see them again at the picnic.

"How bright and happy he looks!" said Mr. Richards, as Mr. Lee rode away.

“Yes,” said Robina, “I never saw such a depth and softness of expression in any other brown eyes; but there seemed an uncommon brilliancy in them to-day, though at times a sadness which touched my heart.”

CHAPTER VII.

ONE SABBATH.

“Peace is on the world abroad;

’Tis the holy peace of God.”

WHO has not felt the calm, soothing influence of a beautiful Sabbath morning? Mr. Richards always rose early on the Sabbath for quiet devotions, gathering bread from heaven, as the Israelites did, before the sun rose. As he looked out that bright Sabbath morning upon the everlasting hills, there seemed to be a sacred hush, a holy calm, resting upon everything, as if nature, free from all labor, had donned her fairest robes, and stood gazing upward to meet the approving smile of her God. The songs of the birds seemed full of richest melody, as if they would hallow the day with their sweetest notes of praise; and the good minister felt, as he had never done before, that there were

“tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

His "sanctum," as he called it, was a short distance from the house, in a secluded spot where the rocks were so arranged by the Hand that made them, as to form a small room, where a shelving rock made quite a comfortable seat. Here Mr. Richards was within call of the house, but had undisturbed quiet for meditation and preparation of his sermons.

"Who is going with me to the stockade for preaching this morning?" he asked when breakfast was over. "I think I shall go as soon as we have had worship, as I must see poor Jim before time for preaching."

"I think we must all go," said Mrs. Richards, "this is such a delightful day, and I am quite rested from my trip now. But I do not fancy going over those high trestles, and through the long, dark tunnel."

"Let me drive you up the stage-road, auntie," said James.

"No, thank you; I much prefer walking, if some of you young folks will go with me."

"If I give you the pleasure of my company around, will you go with me to see poor Jim?" asked Mr. Richards.

"I will gladly go, if you think I can do him any good."

"I feel sure you can cheer and comfort him, my dear, for you know much better than any one else I know how to soothe the suffering and speak words in season to the sorrowing; so we will start as soon as possible, and let James bring up the others in time for the service. Robina," he continued, "I think it might be well for you to take your guitar. We must do all in our power to help those poor convicts, and in order to do that we must let them see that we think them worth helping, and are willing to take trouble to gratify them."

"Shall we take all our Moody and Sankey books, too, father?" said Marie. "Some of the poor fellows may have used them at their homes, and might like to sing the familiar hymns once more."

"A very good suggestion, my daughter; now, be sure that you are all there promptly."

An hour later Mr. Richards walked quietly into Jim's room, greeting him kindly with the inquiry, "How are you this bright Sabbath morning?"

"Much freer from pain, thank you, sir; and I don't mind anything, now that I have peace here," placing his hand upon his heart.

Mr. Richards had already noticed the marked change in Jim's face. The large, gray eyes looked up brightly now, and a new light seemed shining in them. The discontented expression of countenance had given place to a look of peaceful happiness which transformed his face.

"Jim," said Mr. Richards, "I brought Mrs. Richards up with me; she is in Captain Smith's office. Would you like to see her?"

"Oh! yes, sir; I would like to see a lady once more; but would she be willing to come to see me?"

When Jim saw the look of tender sympathy in Mrs. Richards' face, he could not speak.

She took his feebly-extended hand in one of hers, while she laid the other gently upon his fever-heated forehead, and said, softly, "The blessing of your mother's God rest upon you, Jim. Mr. Richards has told me that you have given your heart to the Saviour, and learned to love and trust him, and I am so glad."

Knowing that the sick boy was too weak to

talk, or even to listen, long at a time, the good minister read a short passage of Scripture, made an earnest prayer, and then rose to leave the room.

"I don't know how to thank you both," said Jim, almost choked with emotion, as he looked longingly at Mrs. Richards. "Your visit makes me feel almost as if I had seen my own precious mother."

"Would you like to have me come again?"

"I will be so glad if you will," he said.

"That poor, sick boy has gentle blood in his veins, Captain Smith," said Mrs. Richards, when they reached his office again.

"That is just what I have said and believed. I never did think that he deserved to be here, and I am very glad to see him looking happy for the first time since he came. If it is the religion you all teach that has made such a change in him, I wish that some of the rest of us had some of it, too."

"If you were really willing to accept a gospel which must change your heart and life, as well as give you joy and peace of conscience, it would be yours, Captain Smith," said Mr.

Richards, "for he is able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him."

"No doubt, what you say is true, but I have no time for such things now." Then, glad to change the subject, he asked, "How do you think Jim is getting on?"

"He seems to be resting more quietly than when I saw him yesterday, but I fear there are dangerous symptoms developed since then. What does the doctor think of him?"

"He says that Jim will have a hard pull for his life," said the captain, looking really distressed. "But there is the bell ringing for service. Walk this way, sir, and I will show you the best arrangement that I have been able to make for you."

As the other members of the family from the "castle" had arrived, the whole party followed Captain Smith into the high enclosure, where chairs had been placed for them under a large oak tree. The prison-doors were unlocked, and the convicts were allowed to come out into the open space, which some of them declined doing, unwilling that the ladies of the party should see their degradation. Mr. Richards

took his position where he could command a view of those inside as well as of those in the yard, and such a crowd as it was! Long-indulged sin had left deep traces upon many of the countenances; some looked utterly hardened, while others had a sullen look of misery and shame which was pitiful to see. But the very unusual occurrence of preaching had excited a look of expectancy on almost every face, which was helpful to the good minister.

When the repulsive-looking crowd had settled themselves, some on the benches, and others sitting on the ground or leaning against the wall, Mr. Richards walked round, and, with a kindly greeting to each group, offered the little books to any who could read and would like to sing, which seemed quite gratifying to them. He selected such hymns as were most likely to be familiar, and was pleased to see how many of the convicts joined in singing them, seeming, for the time, to forget their shame and misery, as they waked the echoes of the mountains with sounds which had never been heard there before.

After the singing of several hymns, followed

the sermon, full of gospel truth, so simply told, and with so much feeling and earnestness, that all listened with undivided attention. The earnest pleading with God for forgiveness of past sins, and for grace to enable his hearers to resolve, with God's help, to live better lives in future, touched many hard hearts, which had been supposed to be past feeling.

When the services were over, and before the guards had marched the convicts back into the prison, John begged Captain Smith to allow them to stay a little longer, if Miss Robina would be so kind as to sing a few more pieces for them. Both requests were granted, and, with a silent prayer for assistance, Robina's sweet voice rose full and clear, and every word was heard distinctly. As the pathos of her voice and eyes was added to the words of pleading, tears were falling freely over hardened faces, from eyes unused to weeping; and the light-hearted captain felt a choking sensation quite unusual for him.

Before the party left the stockade, Captain Smith thanked them warmly for both services, and requested them to spend every Sabbath

morning in the same way during their stay in the mountains.

In the afternoon, Mr. Richards and the young people went down to Henry's, where the service, held in the large dining-hall, was in striking contrast to that of the morning, being attended by quite an assemblage of cultured people.

CHAPTER VIII.

BIRTHDAY PICNIC.

“**W**HAT a lovely day you have!” said Mrs. Richards, as she put her arms around Marie and gave her seventeen birthday kisses. “God bless my darling, and give you many happy returns, making your life bright and joyous, with only such clouds across your pathway as he shall see best to make, the brightness more appreciated when they are withdrawn.”

Is there anything so sweet as a mother's kiss and blessing, and a mother's loving words of encouragement and counsel?

“Just see, mother, how gloriously beautiful the mountains look!” said Marie. “I think I never before saw clouds floating so beautifully over these grand old hills. When I first waked they were entirely hidden from view, and I wondered if we were to have a gloomy day for our trip, but as I watched them, the clouds began to ascend, becoming thinner and thinner,

until they were gorgeously tinged by the rising sun. See how they seem to be melting away now before that bright flood of sunlight!"

"It is very beautiful, my child; let it impress itself upon your memory with this sweet truth, that clouds of doubt and sin and care will all disappear as quickly if we but let the sun of righteousness shine into our hearts. Indeed, they would never come if he were always shining there."

"Thank you, precious mother, for the sweet birthday lesson," said Marie, with another kiss and embrace. "I think it must be nearly time for us to start, as the sun doesn't rise here until nearly nine o'clock."

The girls, James, and Mr. Richards, with a basket of tempting viands, were at the stage road at the appointed time to meet the rest of the party for the picnic. Besides Miss Nannie W—— and the versatile Ned, Miss Ella Brown and her brother, there was also a Mr. Jones in the party, who joined them as they reached the road, and seemed to be the special escort of Miss Nannie. They had just exchanged cordial greetings and finished making

pleasant birthday wishes for Marie, when Mr. Lee rode up, according to promise. In answer to inquiries for his health, he said that he had not felt as strong in several years as in the few days since he reached the mountains.

“Forward! ride!” said Ned. “Mr. Richards and I being the most dignified of the party, will show you young people the way to go. Be sure you follow where we lead.”

It does not require much to provoke the risibles of such a merry party, who laughed heartily at the idea of frolicsome Ned being dignified.

Rosalie and Marie rode the same horse in good, old-fashioned style, with Mr. David Brown to watch over them; next came Robina and Mr. Lee, followed by Miss Ella and James, with Miss Nannie and Mr. Jones to bring up the rear. All were bright as the sunbeams which played hide-and-seek between the flowers and ferns, and their laughter rang out as merrily as the musical ripple of the clear stream which leaped and danced over the rocks by the roadside. The scenery was all that the most romantic heart could have desired. The road was generally wide enough for two to ride

abreast, but often grew so narrow that, as Ned had said, his pony could scarcely squeeze through. In one place the path lay over a ledge of rocks with the mountain rising precipitously on one side, and a chasm so deep on the other side that one misstep would have precipitated horse and rider to certain death upon the rocks beneath. After passing safely over the dangerous place each one felt like taking a long breath of thankfulness. Their first stop was made for the benefit of the horses, where a beautiful mountain stream crossed the road, inviting both riders and horses to partake of its cooling draughts.

“What do you think of the trip thus far, Miss Marie?” said Ned, riding up beside her.

“Oh! it is charming! I couldn’t ask anything more pleasant.”

“I like it right well, too; but there must be some startling adventure, or it will become too tame. You are the person, Miss Marie, to get up some excitement in celebration of your birthday. Oh! I have it!” he continued; “do you see that tree which has fallen across the creek? You and Miss Rosalie make your

horse leap over, then you fall off and get nearly drowned (the water is not more than six inches deep). I will be the hero and plunge in to save your life. How would that do?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Ned, that the exploit would cast such a *damp*er upon our feelings that we might fail to enjoy the romantic part of it."

"Whew!" said Ned; "listen to her! Well, if you will not try it, I will. I know my pony can clear that log; but if I should happen to fall off, you are to get greatly excited, and call it the 'Lover's Leap.' Here goes!" he exclaimed, and, giving the pony, which was well trained in such tricks, a sharp cut, he was over with a bound and a tremendous splash.

Loud hurrahs rose from the party, who did not know the next moment whether to laugh or to scream, as they saw the pony give a fearful plunge and then start off, kicking and prancing, as it rushed up the mountain at a most alarming speed.

"What on earth is the matter?" shouted a chorus of voices, as Ned dashed past them, not sitting erect like the hero of whom he had

spoken, but clinging to the neck of the now infuriated pony.

“Yellow-jackets! Only that and nothing more,” answered Ned, not too much alarmed to see the ludicrous side of the performance.

Nothing could prevent peals of laughter from the party now.

“Away goes Gilpin and away goes Gilpin’s hat and —— heels,” cried James.

“Laughing is catching,” said Marie; “and I suggest that we move a little faster from this vicinity, or some of us may soon be touched with a fellow-feeling which may make us much less inclined to laugh.”

They rode some distance before overtaking Ned, who was sitting on a rock by the roadside rubbing his pony’s swollen legs.

“Halloa, John Gilpin!” said Mr. Jones, who was the first to reach him; “I hope you feel none the worse for the ride?”

“Did you ever see anything more gracefully done?” said Ned, bursting into a merry laugh.

“How will that do for the adventure, Mr. Ned?” said Marie.

“Pretty well for a beginning; but you do not

like it much, do you, old partner?" said he, patting the pony affectionately. "Let's move on and see who can make the next diversion for the crowd."

Robina and Mr. Lee were some distance in advance of the others, chatting merrily and enjoying to the fullest extent the exquisite beauty of each new variety of evergreens, forest trees, ferns, and wild flowers which grew in rich profusion to the very edge of the road. In many places the beautiful mountain moss hung in festoons over the huge rocks, which might well have been proud of their soft mantle, with its clusters of white stars, which certainly did not "waste their sweetness on the desert air" without being admired by each group as they passed. Suddenly Mr. Lee caught Robina's bridle-rein and held it firmly as he said, in an undertone: "Look over yonder on the side of that large rock just above the road."

"What is it?" said Robina, whose first dread was of a rattlesnake.

"Do you see that immense hornet's nest hanging from the rock? If they attack us, it will be infinitely worse than Ned's adventure

with yellow-jackets. As I see your father is very near, I will leave you in his care and ride back to warn the rest of the party. You had best go very quietly past the bend in the road, and then ride rapidly for at least a quarter of a mile so as to be entirely out of danger."

Turning his horse, he rode rapidly back to tell of the threatened danger.

"I hope Ned will not risk any of his reckless pranks about that nest," said Mr. Lee, as he rejoined Mr. Richards and Robina. "I begged him to be careful, lest some of the ladies might suffer."

Mr. Richards looked back anxiously. "I see them coming two and two; my other girls are safe. There are Mr. David, Ned, James, and Miss Ella, all safe, but there comes Miss Nannie alone."

"I shall ride back and see if harm has befallen her escort," said James.

"I hope you have not been stung, Miss Nannie?" he said, as he met her.

"Oh, yes I have," she groaned, placing her hand over her mouth as if in great pain. "Please go back to Mr. Jones if you are not

afraid of the hornets ; he was stung by so many that he got too sick to come on."

"Here, uncle," said James, who was always equal to any emergency, "give me a piece of your tobacco to put on Miss Nannie's face, while you and Mr. David go and doctor Mr. Jones."

"How do you know tobacco will help me?" said Miss Nannie.

"I have heard that it would relieve a sting," said James. "I suppose upon the principle that one poison counteracts another," chewing bravely at the tobacco to soften it. "My stars!" he exclaimed, as he began to feel quite sick, "how can men find pleasure in using this vile stuff?"

"Please do not chew it any more, Mr. Burnett. You are very kind ; but you look so sick, I insist upon your giving me that tobacco now."

"Do I look sick?" said James ; "I hope I don't look as badly as ——"

"As I do," said Miss Nannie, rubbing the proposed remedy upon her swollen face ; then, as the ludicrousness of the situation burst upon them, the discomfort from which both were

suffering did not prevent them from indulging in a laugh which seemed to be a relief to their feelings.

"What are you two amusing yourselves with?" asked Robina.

"This gallant youth is doctoring my face," said Miss Nannie, determined to make the best of her misfortune; "but it is not so enjoyable a romance as you might imagine."

"Where is Mr. Jones?"

"Coming on after a while," said Ned, who rode up at that moment; "but he is one sick boy now, stung all over his face, and far from being his mother's pretty boy. Bless me, Nannie!" he continued, "you are a pretty one! It will be no trouble for you to 'hold a stiff upper lip' now, as we boys say. I move you let some of the others try the next excitement, as your experiment has proved unbecoming."

"Looks are the smallest part," said Miss Nannie.

"Call it small if you please," said Ned, "but if you could see your face you would think it looked pretty large; that is, large without the pretty."

"You are a first-rate doctor, Mr. Burnett," said Miss Nannie; "your medicine has relieved me greatly."

"How far are we from the Falls?" asked Marie.

"Almost there," said Ned. "After we turn that bend in the road we will have to climb down the side of the mountain until we reach them. We shall have to leave the horses at the road and walk, or rather tumble, down to the river."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PICNIC.—Continued.

IT certainly was something of a scramble making the descent to the river, but none the less enjoyed by our party because of its roughness, and they all felt fully repaid when they reached the beautiful stream of clear water flowing over the moss-covered stones which formed its bed.

“No Falls here, Mr. Ned,” said Rosalie.

“I hear them,” said Marie. “Come on up this way.” And off she started, the rest of the party following her at a more moderate pace. Soon a loud cheer echoed through the hills, and a few more steps brought them to the lovely Falls.

As they stood and watched the foaming water dashing over the ledge of rocks, and heard its ceaseless roar, they felt fully repaid for the trouble of getting there. The gleams of sunlight which found their way between the rich

foliage painted miniature rainbows ever and anon across the stream.

"Just see those exquisite ferns," said Robina, "how lovely they look as they wave and nod under the delicate spray which falls upon them continually."

"Do you not love to think, Miss Robina," said Mr. Lee, "that all these beautiful things were made by our heavenly Father to give us pleasure and add brightness to our lives?"

"Yes, indeed. I think we enjoy everything more when we look upon our mercies and blessings in that way; and the God of nature seems to come very near us when we realize his presence in all the beauties of nature around us."

"I do not know that there is any Scripture to prove it, but I love to think that there will be flowers in our heavenly home," said Mr. Lee. "I am very fond of them, and they do certainly brighten my life here."

While the rest of the party were looking for a suitable place to arrange the dinner, Robina walked leisurely up the stream with Mr. Lee.

"I fear that this walk is too rough for you,"

she said, noticing the wearied look upon his face, with the kind thoughtfulness which made her ever watchful for the comfort of others.

“I am fatigued, but I do not think it will injure me in any way. This is a lovely spot, though, and this seat looks as if it might have been cut out in this grand old rock for us. Suppose we rest here for a while.”

“Very well,” said Robina; “sit down, and I will come, too, as soon as I gather some of these flowers and mosses to make a birthday wreath for Marie. I think they will all be back here soon, for I feel sure they will not find a more suitable place for dinner than upon that flat rock just beyond you. I wonder that they did not decide upon it without going further in search of a table.”

“What lovely flowers you have gathered!” said Mr. Lee. “Some of them are entirely new to me.”

Robina laid them on the rock by him while she cut a few delicate sprigs of evergreens, and then her deft fingers fashioned a crown beautiful enough to have graced the brow of a queen.

"Oh! you threw away such a lovely little flower!" said Robina, as she reached down to rescue the delicate little blossom as it was floating past her down the stream.

"I did not suppose you could use that flower with the broken stem," said Mr. Lee.

"It is broken," said his fair friend, "but it has such rare beauty that I am going to fasten it here in front of this wreath, where it will show to the best advantage."

"How characteristic that is of yourself!" said the young man, his expressive brown eyes showing feeling too deep for utterance.

"I do not know that I understand you," said Robina, answering his look with one as earnest and sincere.

"Why, you are always looking for the good in your friends, and overlooking their defects, just as you did that flower; and then you stretch out a helping hand and rescue the needy, or raise the fallen, just as you did that little blossom. Yes," he continued, "and as your hand has made it conspicuous in this crown, which must soon fade and die, those whom you have rescued from perishing will

shine in your fadeless crown through all eternity."

Robina felt, too deeply for words, all that he said, but listened with that appreciation which is an inspiration in itself, as he continued: "It may seem vain in me to compare myself to a flower, but all that is in anywise attractive or good in me is due to your influence. You, under God, were the instrument he used to save me from drifting down into the sea of misanthropy. When I found that inherited disease was slowly, but surely, fastening itself upon me, and that the future had nothing in store for me but lingering suffering and early death, I was full of bitterness and sinful rebellion. Do not look so grieved, my good friend. You could not know how much good you have done me, unless you knew from what you have saved me." Then, with the light of a noble, unselfish love beaming in his soft, melancholy eyes, he continued: "My fondest hopes were crushed and broken. I knew that the cherished dream of my life must be given up, and, with my heart overwhelmed with anguish, I felt that life was no longer worth living. Dark waves

of trouble rolled over my soul, and seemed to be sweeping me down, down, I knew not where. Thanks to a loving heavenly Father, your tender hand was extended to draw me out of the deadly current, and to help me to set my feet upon the Rock of Ages. I hope hereafter to shine as a star in your crown of rejoicing."

Robina had often longed to help Mr. Lee, to lead him to the Lamb of God for the comfort and peace which he alone could impart, but feared that her motives might be misunderstood, and, instead of helping him, she might add to his grief by seeming to encourage hopes which could never be realized. Feeling her own inability to do the good so much desired, she had sought the wisdom and grace promised for every time of need, and the earnest words of the young man showed that her prayers had been answered. She had been toying while he was speaking with the wreath upon her lap, and as he finished, took the broken flower from it and pinned it very carefully upon her dress. Then she looked up at him with a smile so full of gladness that it illumined her whole face, and the tears which filled her eyes were more

eloquent than words, as she exclaimed: "I am so glad you have told me this. I shall have stronger faith hereafter as I pray for my friends, because God has honored me by allowing me thus to help you. I intend to keep this dear little flower as a memento of the conversation on our mossy stone seat here. If there were time I would like to tell you how you, too, have helped me, but not now, as I see our party coming back. How merrily their laughter rings out!"

"Yes," said Mr. Lee; "there is nothing more musical than the unaffected laugh of a happy, artless girl."

"Here we are, back again," said Marie, "having found nothing so suitable for a table as this grand old mossy rock. Oh, sister!" she exclaimed, "what a lovely wreath you have!"

"Glad you like it, dear," said Robina, "for it is to deck your fair brow on this your birthday."

"My heart is full of poetry to-day," said Marie, "and if I could find words to express my thanks, they should be yours, sweet sister mine." Bowing her head, she received her

floral crown, and Ned's mock homage and "Hurrah to our lovely July queen! She's the prettiest flower that ever was seen. My! it makes a fellow's heart go pit-a-pat just to look at her!"

"I am sure, Miss Marie, the flowers should be as proud of adorning your brow as you are of being transformed into our queen of July by their aid," said Mr. Lee.

"Oh, thank you!" said Marie. "What would only be fulsome flattery from others is appreciated from you, because you are so sincere."

"I'll tell you what is a fact," said Ned, "I never had such a bad case of heartache but that a good dinner would give me wonderful relief, and I therefore suggest that we investigate those lunch-baskets."

"A very good suggestion," said James; "I, too, am beginning to feel an aching void, and am much inclined to try the effect of dinner. She was a sensible woman who said, 'If you want to keep a man sweet and civil, feed him,' so you ladies had best not try us much longer, as we are on our good behavior to-day."

A tempting repast was soon spread upon the

stone table, to which full justice was done by the hungry pedestrians.

"Where is Mr. Brown?" asked Rosalie, as they gathered around the table.

"Gone to see after Mr. Jones," said Ned.

"Here he comes; what report do you bring from the horneted knight?"

"Not a very favorable one, I am sorry to say; he is more comfortable, but still in so much pain from his wounds, and the temporary destruction of his good looks, that he begs the ladies will excuse him from showing his swollen 'phiz mong pretty folk'—if you will excuse a garbled quotation."

"I am truly glad you escaped so lightly, Miss Nannie," said James.

"Not more so than I am," she answered; "thanks to your thoughtfulness and gallantry, I shall be able to enjoy my dinner, though my lips are still on the order of a full-blown peony."

When dinner was over, and a visit had been paid to a beautiful cave in the side of the mountain near them, Mr. Richards announced that it was time to turn their faces homeward.

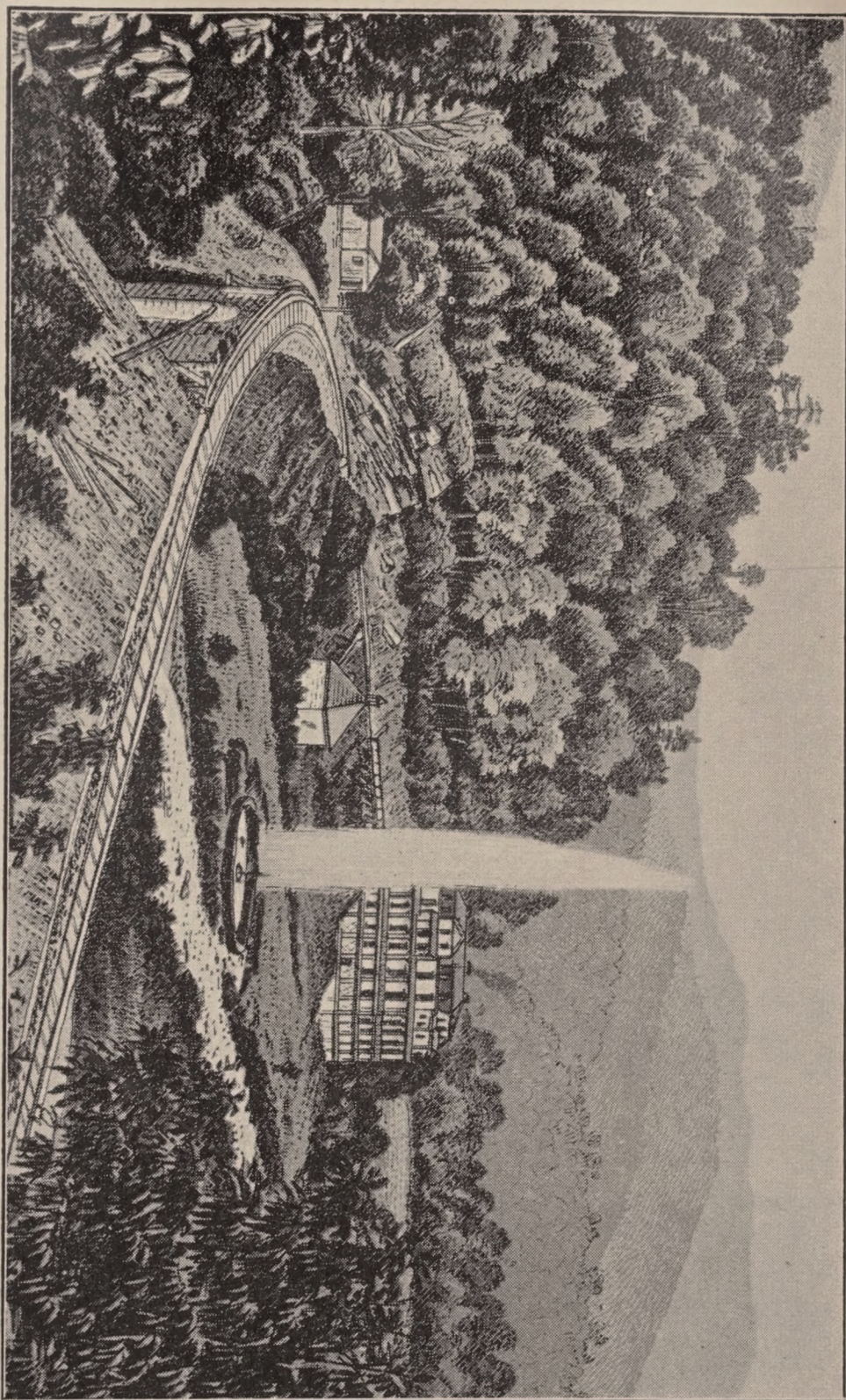
They all felt loath to leave the beautiful picnic ground, but consented to go if Ned would take them home another way, and insure their safety from hornets and yellow-jackets.

The return was accomplished without any further adventure, and all the party but Mr. Jones expressed themselves as delighted with the trip and gave Ned a unanimous vote of thanks for having afforded them the enjoyment of such a never-to-be-forgotten day.

CHAPTER X.

LOST.

MORE than a week had passed since the picnic, and our friends at the "castle" had enjoyed every moment of the time. When they were not taking delightful rambles over the mountains, visiting or receiving visitors, they entertained themselves with music, games, and reading; *Quits* and *Our Mutual Friend* being among the books read aloud. One of the most pleasant excursions they had taken was to the famous Round Knob. This was a rare treat. The president of the road had taken them on his private car, and they had the pleasure not only of his company, but our loved and honored late Governor Vance was also one of the party. His name will be famous among her noblest patriots, whom she is proud to name as one of her sons, as long as North Carolina has a history, and all true southern hearts delight to do honor to his memory. Not only did his public life give him



FOUNTAIN AT ROUND KNOB.

a well-deserved reputation, but all who knew him socially loved him for his warm, honest heart, and his genial manners. His wonderful wit and humor made him the centre of attraction in every social gathering, and the highest expectations of the tourists were more than realized by having him with them as they enjoyed the exquisite scenery and unsurpassed engineering of the railroad through the mountains at Round Knob.

There had been nothing thus far to mar the pleasure of the camping party at the "castle," but one afternoon when Mr. Richards came down from the railroad, where he had gone to get the mail, Mrs. Richards asked him, with some anxiety in her tone, "Where is Edwin?"

"I do not know," he answered, "I have not seen him since I started up for the mail."

"Have not seen him!" exclaimed the now anxious mother. "I gave him permission to go with you to the top of the mountain, and saw him start off as fast as he could go. Have you been up there ever since the train passed?"

"No, after getting the mail, I walked over to Mud-cut to talk with some of the convicts who

are at work there. Where could the little fellow have gone when he failed to find me?"

All was alarm and excitement, for the dangers were great for an inexperienced child.

Mr. Richards hurried up the mountain lest Edwin might have ventured across the fearful trestle, and been killed by falling upon the rocks below. The others, by twos, went to different points of danger. But the mountains only sent back a dull echo as the precious name "Edwin! Edwin!" was shouted from time to time. Their anxiety increased as the distant rumble of the approaching train was heard. What if the dear boy should be caught by the train upon a trestle, or in one of the tunnels! The thought almost paralyzed them! Suddenly it occurred to Rosalie that Edwin may have understood his mother as giving him permission to go to the top of the mountain, and, rather than return alone over the high trestles and through the dark tunnels, had preferred going round by the stage-road.

"Marie and I will go on the stage-road, Auntie," said Rosalie, and immediately the two young girls started off, only stopping to inquire

of every one they met for the lost boy. But no one had seen him. When they reached the stockade, flushed and almost breathless, their only answer to Captain Smith's anxious inquiry, "What is the matter, young ladies?" was, "Have you seen our Edwin this afternoon?"

"Yes," he answered. "The little fellow was here a short time ago asking for his father. When I told him he had not been here since his morning visit to Jim he started back down the railroad."

"Down the railroad!" gasped Marie. "Was it before or after that last train?"

"Before," said Captain Smith; "and I did not think of the child's danger until he was out of sight, but I sent a 'trusty' after him, and hope you will find him safe at home."

Thanking him for his kindness, the girls hurried down the railroad in a fast run, but had only gone a short distance when they saw James coming to meet them. What tidings does he bring? Ah! he is smiling. "Halloa!" he shouts, "the lost is found!" When he joined them he told them that the always-obe-

dient little boy had understood his mother as having given him permission to go to the top of the mountain, had gone up safely alone, and returned unhurt, under the protection of the faithful John. "And now, my girls," he continued, "we must return as rapidly as possible, or night will overtake us. We can shorten our walk by going across the mountain, as it would be too great a risk to venture down the track when the train is so nearly due. We might meet it in the long, dark tunnel, which is too narrow for us to escape in safety. Here is the path over the mountain, but it is so narrow that we must go 'Indian file.' I will go in front, and you girls must keep a sharp lookout, or you may happen to step on a rattlesnake and hurt it."

They were certainly in great danger from snakes, for the ferns and whortleberry bushes were more than waist high, and so thick that they could not see the ground. The climb up the mountain was a steep one, but they all walked on bravely; yet, notwithstanding their utmost speed, night overtook them before they had gotten half-way down on the homeward

side, and in the darkness they lost the path. Only those who have been lost upon a wild mountain at night can imagine the horror of such a situation. But our young people were very brave, and, with silent prayer for guidance and protection, they moved on slowly, James feeling his way as best he might with a large stick. With all his care, he lost his footing several times, and slipped ten feet or more over the rocks, each time finding the girls waiting anxiously for him when he had climbed up to them again, fearing lest he had fallen over one of the precipices which were near their path. After several such dangerous slides, he stopped abruptly, and with an effort to make the best of everything, as was always his rule, said: "Well, girls, I suppose we shall have to climb up into some of these trees and roost until daylight."

Marie shuddered, and was almost overcome by the violent pain in her head, caused by excitement and weariness, but brave, courageous little Rosalie pressed her arm tightly round her, whispering words of hope and comfort.

"You see," said James, "or rather it is so dark you cannot see, the only way we can cross

the deep cut in front of us is by walking over on a narrow ledge of rock, and it would be a fearful risk to venture now."

Just then a loud "Halloo" rang out on the still night air.

"Halloo!" shouted the lost ones, almost wildly.

"Oh!" said Rosalie, "that is uncle. Now, dear old girl, be brave, and we will soon be safely back again."

Mr. Richards had started out in search of the wanderers, armed with his heavy walking-cane and lantern, knowing the great dangers which beset their path if they attempted to take the nearer way back. Learning from their answer where they were, he called to them to stand still until he could reach a safe place on the opposite side of the cut. He then raised the lantern as high as possible and shouted, "This way, my children; come to me." But the light blinded their eyes, and only seemed to make darkness more visible; so lowering the lantern, they were guided entirely by his oft-repeated, "This way; come to me." In that way they crossed the narrow ledge in safety, where the

morning light showed them that one misstep would have hurled them over the precipice upon the rocks below. Great was the rejoicing when all the party were gathered together once more in the little cabin which they called home, and all felt that they could understand now, better than ever before, the significance of "lost, and is found."

CHAPTER XI.

FOUND.

“**M**R. RICHARDS! Mr. Richards!” called John’s familiar voice at the early dawn.

“What will you have?” said Mr. Richards.

“I came down to beg you to come as soon as you can to see Jim, if you please, sir.”

“Certainly; I will go immediately. Is he much worse?”

“Yes, sir,” said John; “Captain Smith and I have been up all night with him, and thought he was dying several times, so I came down for you as soon as it was light.”

“I will be ready in a few moments, John. Tell Captain Smith I will be there as soon as possible,” and waiting only long enough to take a hurried cold breakfast, he was soon by the sufferer’s bedside. He had visited him almost daily, and hoped the vigorous young life would overcome the disease. He had seemed perfectly resigned to God’s will, his desire for life being only to live that he might tell others

what a dear Saviour he had found, and to atone, in some degree, for the anguish of heart which he had caused his mother. One look at the sunken features and wild, glaring eyes made the good minister's heart sink.

"How long has he looked this way?" asked Mr. Richards, as he stood outside the door with faithful John.

"All night, sir. He does not know any one; either lies in a stupor, or is talking wildly, in a way that tears my old heart all to pieces."

Not strange that it should, for the sweet, peaceful look was gone from Jim's face, and in its place was the frenzied look of a madman gleaming from his blood-shot eyes.

"Hear what he is saying," said John.

"I told you I did not want to go, and would not have a hand in any such business," screamed Jim, fiercely; "you made me go, and then let me bear as much blame as the rest of you, when I did nothing, and thought I was just waiting in the street to go with you to another place. How could you have deceived me so? Oh, my poor mother! it will kill her that I have brought disgrace upon her name."

With a heart-rending groan he covered his face with his hands and sank exhausted into unconsciousness again.

Motioning John to bring him cool water, Mr. Richards gently sponged the hot face and hands, stroking them as tenderly as his mother could have done. The poor boy seemed soothed for a short time, but suddenly the fearful burden which had oppressed his heart so long burst the restraint of dethroned reason, and his wailing cry rang through the room: "Oh, mother! dear, dear mother! look at me and say you forgive me! My heart is breaking! I cannot live any longer without your love!" Then, sinking almost into a whisper, he continued: "Jesus has forgiven me, and he knows how sorry I am, and that I pray every day for the wicked boys who helped me to do so wrong and run off from home. If he can forgive me, will not you, oh, my mother?"

His excitement was so great that four men could scarcely hold him upon his bed until he could be quieted by opiates.

As soon as possible, Mr. Richards hastened to the telegraph office and wired Jim's mother:

“Your lost boy is here, very ill; come to him quickly.”

Turning from the office, he made the oft-repeated prayer that the poor sufferer's life might be spared, at least until his mother could reach him from her home. He reproached himself now for not having insisted upon writing to Mrs. Ravenel as soon as Jim told him of his parentage and real name; but, as he had plead that it should not be done, Mr. Richards had yielded his better judgment to that of the sick boy, and only sent the telegram when he felt that it would be cruelty to the yearning mother-heart to keep her longer in ignorance.

“I am very glad you sent that message,” said Captain Smith, “but I greatly fear he will not live until she arrives.”

“I trust our Father will answer the united prayers of my family, and spare his life; but, if not, we know that God makes no mistakes, and it will be for the best in some way.”

“I hope you will be with us as much as possible, Mr. Richards,” said Captain Smith; for, though not a pious man himself, he felt much more comfortable in having a minister present

when the angel of death seemed to be hovering so near them.

"I will go down now to let my family know of Jim's critical condition, get some dinner, and return to help you through the night. They are all greatly interested in the poor boy, and distressed to know of his dangerous illness."

After his return, Mr. Richards took the place of head nurse by the sick boy, who seemed soothed by his presence, even in his semi-conscious condition. Whenever there were lucid moments, Mr. Richards repeated comforting texts of Scripture, hoping the Great Physician might by them speak peace to the tortured soul.

The answering telegram. "I will start at once to my boy," had roused the good man's sympathy and pity for the suffering mother during her long journey of agonizing suspense, and he plead that she, too, might be sustained by the blessed Comforter.

With a sinking heart, he saw in the morning light the sunken eyes and death-like look upon Jim's face. He was so weak now as to be easily controlled, and his talking, though still

excited and wild at times, was less loud and vehement.

Slowly the hours dragged by. Closer and closer the death-angel hovered, until all in the room seemed almost to feel his cold breath fan their cheeks. Mr. Richards and John had kept a constant watch during the day, the doctor and Captain Smith coming in ever and anon to see if there was any change, and to offer any service which might be needed.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Jim opened his eyes, looked at Mr. Richards for a moment with a perfectly rational expression, and then said, in an earnest tone: "Mr. Richards, please tell my mother I was not afraid to die; I am trusting in Jesus."

Before any reply could be made, the weary eyes closed so gently that the doctor stepped forward and felt the fluttering pulse to see if the spirit had taken its flight. There was life still, but the silver cord seemed almost loosed.

Mr. Richards sank upon his knees, in a hushed voice commended the dying boy to the tender keeping of his mother's God, then silently left the room.

The train was coming. Oh! if the mother could only come on it! Minutes seemed hours as the train came slowly through tunnels and over the high trestles.

Is that a lady hurrying through the coach?

Yes; the conductor is helping a lady off, and Mr. Richards is at her side in a moment.

"Have I the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Ravenel?" asked he, in a voice of mingled respect and sympathy.

"I am Mrs. Ravenel," she answered, her eyes expressing unutterable anguish; the quivering lips seeming to refuse to give any utterance. "My boy?" was all she could say.

With a questioning glance at the doctor, who was meeting them, Mr. Richards asked, "Is he living still?"

"He is," said the doctor, bowing to Mrs. Ravenel.

"Take my arm, madam, and let me assist you," said Mr. Richards, gently, seeing her delicate frame quivering like an aspen leaf from intense excitement.

With a powerful effort of her will she composed herself and was quite calm when they reached Captain Smith's office.

"Let me see him," she plead, "I promise to be perfectly quiet and composed."

"You must prepare yourself to be greatly shocked by his appearance," said the doctor. "He is in a stupor so near akin to death that you will scarcely believe him living. It is a fearful crisis, the least excitement would be instantly fatal, but if he can get a quiet sleep, there will be hope for his life."

"You can trust me," said the sorrowing mother, and the three silently entered the room, Mrs. Ravenel clinging to the strong arm which supported her tenderly, as she shuddered fearfully, and involuntarily clasped her hand over her eyes, as if to shut out the death-like vision. Kneeling at the bedside, she silently watched her boy as he lay motionless as if in death. No sound passed her lips, but into the ear of the God of Sabaoth entered the anguished prayer, "Oh, Father! let him live, if only to recognize his mother and know that she has forgiven him."

In a short time Jim became restless again and began inarticulate moaning. How the yearning mother-heart longed to speak, but she

only bent over him and stroked his brow gently with her soft hand. Even in his half-conscious state the touch of love was recognized without opening his eyes, a peaceful smile overspread his pale face, and he whispered, "My mother! Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" The thin arms were raised beseechingly, clasped for a moment round the mother's neck and then fell back upon the bed—in death? No, a long sigh of intense relief, and he slept as sweetly as an infant. With a mother's untiring devotion Mrs. Ravenel sat for several hours gently stroking her boy's head, fearing to stop lest it might waken him.

Feeling sure that she could be trusted not to excite him, and that the crisis would be safely passed when he woke, the doctor and Mr. Richards left the room, thinking it best for them to be alone when Jim's consciousness should return.

Faithful John was stationed outside the door, ready to render any needed assistance at a moment's notice.

With a very thankful heart Mr. Richards returned to the "castle," leaving word that he

would see Mrs. Ravenel and Jim in the morning.

We will leave the reader to picture for himself the joyous meeting between long-parted mother and son, when, after hours of restful sleep, Jim opened his eyes to find her precious face bending over him, and hear the loved voice whispering, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

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"Farewell, dear old 'castle,' we are loath to leave you, and will never, never forget the many happy hours we have spent under your roof."

"Now, Marie, do not get pathetic," said Rosalie, "or we will all have to shed tears."

Most of the party had gone up to the railroad on their way to take the train at the top of the mountain, and were taking a last look at the "castle," before returning to their home in the low country.

James and Robina had taken the horse and jersey to join a small party for a more extended trip through western North Carolina.

Our party were joined at the train by Mrs.

Ravenel, and her son, Herbert, who were to travel with them as far as their way was the same. The happy mother looked ten years younger than she did on that dreadful afternoon when she had reached the mountains. No one would have recognized in the handsome, well-dressed, happy-looking Herbert Ravenel our quondam friend Jim. All the necessary information had been gained by Captain Smith and Mr. Richards, who had interested Governor Vance in Jim's sad history, and, through his influence, gained his release from the remaining term of service.

The sad memory of the years of shame and disgrace which had blighted the early youth that would otherwise have been bright and happy always caused a bitter pang to Herbert and his mother. But even that dark cloud had its "silver lining," for while wearing the shackles, which were the penalty for broken laws, he had been released from the bondage in which Satan had bound him, and having been made free by the Son, was free indeed. The love and gratitude which he and his mother felt for Mr. Richards was deep and lasting, for

they felt that to his instruction and tender nursing they owed, as God's instrumentality, both the spiritual and temporal life of the wanderer. To Mrs. Richards, too, they were warmly attached, for she had done much for the sick boy, bestowing many such thoughtful little attentions as only a tender mother-heart could suggest.

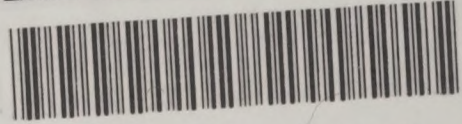
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Many years have passed since that summer of which we have written. Our young friend Herbert, now a prosperous and beloved physician in a southern city, is forgetting the things which are behind and earnestly pressing forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. With him lives the faithful nurse, John, the "trusty," from whom they had gained the promise before leaving the mountains that he would come directly to them at the end of his nearly-expired term of service. He, too, and others of those convicts will shine hereafter as stars in the crown of the faithful old minister. In his new home, where none know but themselves of the sins of his early youth, repented of, and cleansed by

the blood of Christ, John is a faithful laborer in the Master's vineyard, ever careful to lend a helping hand to raise the fallen.

All but two of the happy party at the "castle" are living still, for they were real, and not imaginary characters. The earnest voice of the faithful minister has ceased upon earth, and his songs of praise are uniting with those who worship around the throne of God, where he has welcomed many of those whom he led to the Saviour. "Whom the gods love die early." The noble James received the summons at high noon to come up higher, and he, too, ceased from his labors. Others of the party, who have often borne the heat and burden of the day, are looking forward with joyful hope to joining those who have gone before in rest and worship upon the holy mount of Jerusalem the golden. For the only one of that happy mountain party who is still wandering from the fold, the pleading voice still echoes from heaven, "This way, my boy; come to me."

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